

E-sage-ing Program: Concept of Operations

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Program Purpose

The overall goal of the E-sage-ing program is to address the significant percentage increase in the world's elderly population projected over the next 10-15 years, by creating a way to help elders become more engaged individuals who continue to contribute to society using their great experience and wisdom. The program serves many purposes, including making elders, even those living alone in remote areas, feel like a part of the community, as well as giving them a feeling of self worth. Connecting elders with youths also helps break down and prevent many of the stereotypes and negative attitudes that the two groups may have towards each other. From the youths' perspective, they gain a feeling of responsibility and accomplishment, realizing that they are making a significant difference in the life of the elder. Both sides have a great deal to teach each another, and using the E-sage-ing program, to both connect the populations and facilitate the sharing of knowledge, people from across states, nations, and even the world can join together to form a meaningful friendship to benefit all parties involved.

Pilot Projects:

Initially, two pilot projects will be conducted over the period of a month, starting on July 7th and continuing into August, to help evaluate and yield constructive feedback on the program. The first will take place in Albuquerque, NM between elders at the Encino Gardens home, a lower income retirement facility, and three youths who are children of Department of Senior Affairs workers. The second will take place in Deming, NM between elders at the Deming Senior Center and youths at the local YWCA. For the current trials, both the elder and youth populations were initially recruited with the target attributes of helping the underserved and underprivileged individuals in the state. As a result of program limitations, however, some of the groups involved were selected based on convenience and availability at the time of the pilot.

Albuquerque Pilot:

The Albuquerque pilot will take place between three elders and three youths. The three elders are all over 65 and reside at the Encino Gardens facility. Using their current network of computers, along with cameras and microphones supplied by the State Agency on Aging (SAoA), the elders will connect to the SAoA's website, and from there select the link to the E-sage-ing programs website. Alternatively, the elders can use a bookmark in the browser to jump directly to the E-sage-ing website. This elder population uses the computer labs from time to time, and is familiar with surfing the Internet and using web-based e-mail (i.e. Yahoo! Mail), and should thus have no problem in finding or navigating around the site. The initial time they log into the site, after being briefed on the program and signing waiver forms, the elders will be instructed to follow through a set of web pages containing information on the program and tutorials for how to use the Microsoft NetMeeting and the program's modules. Once they have reviewed

this information, the next time the elder logs in, they will be instructed to head straight to the modules section to begin using the E-sage-ing program.

The module section will include a table that consists of rows indicating the modules offered, and columns specifying which group the material is appropriate for. For example, the first module, attitudes towards aging, will have a link in the first column to a module designed from the senior's perspective, and the second column will have a link to a module on the same topic designed from the youth's perspective. These modules will be designed with the Microsoft Office products PowerPoint and Word, so that they may be sharing in a NetMeeting session and discussed by both participants. Having a separate yet similar module for the two groups was deemed necessary for reasons including the addition of certain age specific questions as well as the complexity of the words and grammar used at the two different reading levels.

Each module will then instruct the elder to connect to NetMeeting, find their friend, and begin to discuss the current module while following along with each other. Each module will also contain a link at the bottom of the page, so that once the session for the day is complete, the elder will be able to fill out a brief form evaluating the content, make suggestions on changes or new content, and express concern over any inappropriateness encountered during the session. While the sessions are in place, computer-monitoring software will be running in the background, recording data on sites visited, applications used, and keystrokes typed. This data will then be used to protect the program participants from being exploited, as well as to fix and refine the program in the future. Examples of possible improvements include shortening exercises that seem to take a significantly long amount of time, and providing more content and modules in areas that seem to garner the most interest. After final completion of the program, the elder will then be asked to fill out a questionnaire about the program, in order to gauge what needs to be improved to make the program more enjoyable to the participants involved.

Problems that can be foreseen at this point include a lack in the ability to capture voice conversations by the computer-monitoring software, and a lack of security measures. Both of these points need to be addressed during the pilot to iron out problems before a full program launch, but exactly how this will be done has not yet been dealt with.

Youths in the Albuquerque pilot are all children of Department of Senior Affairs workers. Logistical problems with finding a group of youths forced this group's selection partially out of convenience, but the individuals involved meet all of the desired criteria except for the underprivileged, underserved status. As was the case with the elders at the Encino Gardens facility, these youths already have computers set up in their homes, and will be provided with a camera and microphone for use during the pilot. Their procedure for using the E-sage-ing program will be very similar to the elders, with the exception that they will be using the modules specifically designed towards youths.

- *A Typical Day For An Elder*

It is 3:00pm Tuesday afternoon, and Rosa has just arrived at the senior center's computer lab for her weekly E-sage-ing session with Suzy. Rosa begins by opening up MSN Messenger by double-clicking on the icon in her system tray. After seeing the icon next to Suzy's name indicating that she is online, Rosa selects "Actions" from the menu bar, then "Start NetMeeting...". In the dialog box that pops up, Rosa highlights Suzy's name with a left click, then launches NetMeeting by clicking "OK". When NetMeeting launches, Rosa is brought directly into a call with Suzy, and they greet each other and exchange the usual pleasantries. When the conversation begins to die down, Rosa suggests they start exploring the next E-sage-ing module.

She then opens Internet Explorer and using the Favorites menu jumps to the New Mexico State Agency on Aging's website. From here, she clicks a link on the left hand menu and is brought to the E-sage-ing homepage. Selecting the "modules" button on the left hand menu, Rosa is brought to the modules page of the E-sage-ing site, which lists the 10 introductory modules available. Since Suzy and Rosa completed the third module last session, Rosa selects the "For Elders" link next to the "Module 4: School" listing. After the module has popped up the Word document, Rosa begins to read through the text. This particular exercise is a fill in the blank, sentence-form of storytelling. Rosa offers to let Suzy go first, and proceeds to listen to her tell about her parents, older brother, and dog Fluffy. Rosa comments from time to time about how nice they all sound, and even adds some of her fond memories of the dog she had when she was a child, Franklin. After Suzy is finished, Rosa begins to tell her tale, talking about her children and grandchildren and remembering her parents and the hills of northern Oklahoma where she grew up.

Once she has finished, Rosa realizes that they have been chatting and enjoying each others company for well over the initial hour of time that they had planned. She suggests that Suzy get started on her homework, a painting of her family for class, and the two agree to meet again the next week to continue their conversations. Suzy mentions that she will be going to the community swimming pool after school next Tuesday, so the two agree to meet at 4:00 instead of their normal time. After saying goodbye, Rosa closes NetMeeting and Internet Explorer, logs off of MSN Messenger, and leaves the senior center for home.